

"GREAT COMMISSION"

Presbyterian Survey

THE MAGAZINE FOR PRESBYTERIANS

Index

x Adrian Sauer ^{in 1590} (153, 160) championed the "Great Commission" as a Christian, missionary & theologian.
But, also based on his view of theology.

Edited by J. Hennebus in 1648

Justice in Wolf in 1661

(Bisch ²⁴⁷ ~~248~~, n. 3

with a Table ..

Opposed by Johann Seibel at Theologiae Bozge, Coloniae

- (Ibid)

Philip Nicolaus (1556-1600)

as - Maximilian von St. Paul, Bozge from an early history.

Per - Index of Some Views on the Great Commission

See Annals 1906: 25-31 (Ibid), Part Two

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Beetitudes - most popular - too popular?

Commandments - they're not the thing -
in our present-day secular
society. But in our Ref.
context of original sin - were and
necessary.

Commission - best of all -

A touch of command - but
a promise of power - and a
laser-like focus on what to
do.

smoffett. lec\gtcommis

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Mt 20:18-30; Mk 16:15-18; Lk 24:45-49; Jn 20:21; Acts 1:8

What a privilege it is to be back at OMS (the Overseas Mission Study Center) and to have a share in the dedication of this very new, very impressive building. And what a great name: the Great Commission Hall! It's the right name, for the right building in the right institution, in the right place, right next to what I think is the greatest missions library in the world, the Day Missions Library at Yale University. The Great Commission Hall.

We could have named it the Great Beatitudes Hall, after what is probably the most widely known sermon ever preached. That would have been quite appropriate. After all, the Sermon on the Mount was a sermon for training the disciples to be missionaries. Both versions, Matthew (chap. 5) and Luke (chap. 6) mention that though Jesus was talking to a great multitude, he was speaking straight to his disciples. The Beatitudes are a virtual blue-print for them of Jesus' own priorities in mission.

Let me name just a few. Option for the poor, for example. Some think that we invented that often repeated missionary mantra in the 20th century. It's 2000 years old. It's Luke's version (not Matthew's version) of the first beatitude, of course. It says literally, "Blessed are the poor for yours is the kingdom of God". Some also think that not until our own enlightened times did missionaries learn that arrogance in mission is all wrong. But that lesson too comes from the beatitudes. Jesus taught his disciples, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt. 5:5). And the struggle for justice was not invented by liberation theology or the civil rights movement.

The beatitudes told us long ago, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after justice (righteousness). (Mt. 5:6). There's nothing new, either, about missions and peace. Our 20th century in fact which talks so much about peace is one of the bloodiest centuries of history. The 7th beatitude does more than talk about peace, Jesus tells the disciples here that their mission is to make peace: "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Mt 5:9) Why not name this hall for the Beatitudes?

Well, it seems to me that there is something about Great Beatitude Hall that doesn't quite fit. Perhaps it's because it's a sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus was preaching to the crowds, not just teaching the disciples. And though preaching is an integral part of mission--perhaps the central part of mission if it is a witness about Jesus Christ--there is a difference in style and nuance between witness and preaching. Note how each beatitude, each blessing is followed by a promised reward. But that isn't the motive of mission. Mission is not all blessings and rewards and success.

If we stop with the Beatitudes; if the mission is to preach promises and reward and stop there; then the Christian faith remains what the communists always accused it of being, "Pie in the sky by and by"--Do good, and some day you'll be happy; you may be called a failure here but you'll be a success in heaven. That is not the gospel. And it's not really what the Sermon on the Mount says, unless like the Jesus Seminar you cut out the parts you don't like. There is a most interesting letter from Azariah of Dornakal to Gandhi about that. Gandhi sometimes said, in effect, that he had the utmost respect for Jesus, but as for Christianity, the Sermon on the Mount was enough Christianity for him. Azariah wrote to him:

"My Dear Mahatmajee: When you ask the missionaries to do only social

service and not to speak of Jesus as the Saviour. you are expecting the railway train to run without the engine".

Beatitudes without the rest of the gospel turn into platitudes. It takes a command to turn the beatitudes into mission, to turn mission theory into what the "academy" loves to call praxis.

So why don't we call this Hall the Great Commandment Hall. Gandhi should have read the Sermon on the Mount more carefully. I was reading it over again recently and was startled to see what comes directly after the Beaititudes. Its as if in those first verses (Matt. 5:3-14) Jesus was leading the choir, singing Amazing Grace, and then the choir stops and Jesus stands up to preach. And what does he preach about? Amazing Grace? No--the Law! "Don't think I have come to abolish the Law" (Matt. 5:17). He stopped singing grace. He changed the subject from social compassion. Suddenly he is talking tough commandments. For without the commandments, the good news of the beatitudes--blessing and rewards and grace--is like a body without a spine, a head and heart without legs.

Elsewhere he wraps all the commandments up into two commands: The Great Commandment, which, like the great beatitudes, is another of those beautifuly, short cameo summaries that Jesus gives us of Christian mission. Without the Great Commandment, the good news of the beatitudes-- blessing and rewards and grace--is like a body without a spine, a head and a heart without legs. This is how Jesus summed it up for a lawyer:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind. That is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt. 22:36-40)

The mission begins where the Great Commandment begins. It

begins with God. Then, and only then does it spread to our neighbor. The lawyer wanted to argue. "Who is my neighbor?" "What do you mean?". It means that God's mission spreads out through us as far as there is human need. From Jerusalem to Jericho for a starter. The Good Samaritan. Great Commandment mission spreads on out down the road to Jericho and from there to the ends of the earth. What a great name for a missionary building: The Great Commandment Hall!

To the ends of the earth! But start with God. Some tell us today that the Christian mission starts with the world.. "Let the world, the real, needy, suffering world set the agenda". That was the missionary slogan of the day a few years ago. But if mission starts with the world, it starts too small, limited by the little we really know about the world, and by the even less we know about how to meet its needs. We end up standing at the wrong end of a telescope, looking down the Jericho road, while someone else, a Samaritan with no status and no telescope, gets out onto the road, and finds the need, and does something about it.

I'm afraid many of us Christians are not Samaritan enough. We do more looking through the telescope than riding down the road, more talking than doing, while the doers, those out on the road itself, seem, at least in numbers these days, to be from what we thought was the wrong side of the ecclesiastical tracks like the Samaritan--the Pentecostals, the Indendependents, the Faith Missions and Wycliffe, YWAM, and World Vision. The plain fact of the matter is the third world churches are not only more like them than like us mainline churches, but are growing faster too.

So shouldn't we have called this the Great Commandment Hall? I don't think so. For one thing it sounds too legalistic. If we are going to be

legalistic, it's better to be biblically legalistic than Book of Order legalistic. One surprised Korean Presbyterian pastor said to me once, "American Presbyterians take the Book of Order more seriously than they do the Bible". But I'm glad we didn't call this the Great Commandment Hall for another reason. There is a better name.

The name of this building is The Great Commission Hall, and "Greata Commission" is the right name. Some people tell me that what the church needs is a return to "Great Commission" missions. I thoroughly agree. But then I ask them, "Which 'Great Commission'?" And they look at me with sympathy for my ignorance, and quote either Matt. 28:18, or Mark 16:15. And I have to tell them, "But one text isn't enough. There are five "Great Commissions" in the New Testament, and the Bible doesn't call any one of them "the Great Commission".

It takes all five of them to be "The Great Commission". Let me run quickly through the list. Number 1. In the Great Commission according to John (20:21), Jesus says, "As the Father sent me, so send I you". That tells us, I think, that the mission is God's. It doesn't belong to the church, my church or yours, or whether the church is a national indigenous church or a foreign missionary church. It has the further implication that you don't go until God sends you, and if Gd calls you, he does, you are already a missionary you don't need an invitation to make you one.

Number 2, the commission in Luke (24:45-49). Luke brings the mission into clearer, focus. There Jesus says, "Preach. Preach rementance and forgiveness of sins in my name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Begin at Jerusalem, where you are, until you get further guidance". Now that might wisely include checking to see if an invitation from somewhere might

not make things go more smoothly.

Number 3. But it is Mark (16:15-18) who has the starting gun. He says, "Go!". "Go into all the world and preach the gospel", and he adds enough about signs and wonders to make a Presbyterian tremble--"healing" and "tongues"/ and the casting out of demons".

If that is too much for some of you, go to Commission Number 4. The Commission according to practical Matthew (28:18-20) is comfortingly wise and realistic. Matthew seems to say, "Don't just preach or rely on miracles. Teach. He says, "Make disciples, baptizing, and teaching them all that I have commanded you." Teach the whole gospel. It's not about a king without a kingdom, and and it's not a kingdom without the King. It's about the Lord Jesus Christ, and the kingdom of God. Here I find the beginnings of a challenge to plant and form the church.

[Number 5)But one thing is still missing. Luke adds it in Acts (1:8). Power. Not yours, and not mine, and not our church's, but the power of the Holy Spirit. And if you ever begin to doubt that there is power available for the Christian mission, I suggest you consider Korea. When the Korea Mission celebrated 50 years of Protestant work in Korea a commission came out to ask my father why the church was exploding with growth so fast. His answer disappointed them. It seemed so piously unrealistic. He said, "Gentlemen, for fifty years we have held up before these people the Word of God and the Holy Spirit did the rest." Today the power is still there. Methodism began in England, but the three largest Methodist congregations in the world are in Seoul, Korea. Presbyterianism began in Switzerland, but the four largest Presbyterian congregations in the world are in Seoul, Korea. Pentecostalism as a modern movement began in Southern California, but the

largest Pentecostal congregation in the world is in Seoul, Korea. Not size is not a work of the Spirit, but what those churches are doing not only in Korea but in mission all around the world is, I believe as firmly as did my father, the work in power of the Spirit.

And speaking of the Holy Spirit, and of building the kingdom without the King, may I conclude by wrapping up all five of the commissions with a story from Korea about the King, the Great Commissioner?

About 80 years ago a Professor from Yale, from right here in New Haven came out to visit Korea with the best of motives. He wanted to see missions at first hand and lend a helping hand if he could. He asked if he might preach in a country church, so one Sunday morning a missionary took him out on a short trip, ready to act as his interpreter. The good professor began impressively like a good Yalie. His first sentence was, "All thought is divided into two categories, the abstract and the concrete". The missionary looked at him, and at the congregation of farmers, and grandmothers and barefoot children, and translated it without hesitation, "I have come here all the way from America to tell you about the Lord Jesus Christ."

That's what this "Great Commission Hall" is all about. The mission is God's and the Commissioner is Christ, and the power is the Holy Spirit. And wherever the Great Commissioner sends us from this Great Commission Hall, go in power by the Spirit, and let our first words, spoken and unspoken, be "I have come all this way to tell you about the Lord Jesus Christ".

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Samuel Hugh Moffett
New Haven, CT. June 12, 1999

The Great Commission

- notes by Sam Moffett

John Sudder, The Redeemer's Last Command. N.Y. Am. Tract Soc., n.d.

Arthur T. Peason, "The Mission and Commission of the Church," Missionary Review of the World, new series, 2, pp. 321-332. 1889

"Princeton Student," "The Theology of Missions," The Missionary Review of the World, 10, pp. 125-131. 1887

Charles Hodge, in an 1854 Sunday Conference, listed 3 missionary motivations.

F-33
H 6625

- ① the command of Christ
- ② love to Christ and gratitude for the benefits of redemption
- ③ the absolute necessity of the gospel for salvation.

Beaver traces American missionary motivations:

F-50
H 4277

- ① 12th c. - the glory of God, love of Christ, + compassion for physical + spiritual state of red Indians.
- ② After American revolution - gloria dei, takes on "Hippocratical color of 'disinterested benevolence'".

- sense of Christ perceived "chose in terms of obedience to the Great Commission" -
- R. Pierce Beaver, "Eschatology in American Missions," in Basilea: Tribute to Walter Hertzog, pp. 60-75. Ed. Jan Harmelink + Hans J. Margull. (Stuttgart: Evangel. Missionverlag, 1959).

(1829) - Williamson, 1831

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Hervey, Wm. The Spirit of Missions. Before sailing to India - "We are required to love Christ above all others, and to show our love to him by obeying his commands.. " (p. 10).

Wm. Carey - "he (Jesus) sent forth his disciples to preach the good tidings to every creature, and to endeavor by all possible methods to bring over a lost world to God. They went forth according to their divine commission... Enguing, p. 5 (Introduction)

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, a little before his departure, commissioned his apostles to go, and teach all nations; or, as another evangelist expresses it, go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. This commission was as extensive as possible.. (p. 8.

"amongst the particular baptist denomination.. (p. 84

The Great Commission [Sermons and Addresses, vol 1.] Foreign Missionary Sermons, ABCFM, 1812-1869
(Gen. Ass) Ed. of Edw. Fanning
for Am. Soc. N.Y. & Brooklyn etc.

1863. Elisha L. Cleaveland, Sermon before [annual mtg. of] ABCFM in Rochester, N.Y. (Boston: T.R. Marvin & Sons, 1863) p. 3

" Luke 24: 45-47 "Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures and said unto them... that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

" This is the first great commission ever received by the church from her risen Lord, for the evangelization of the world. Forty days after, it was repeated in still more dramatic terms, as he stood ready to depart... - in Dickens's Sermons and Addresses, vol. I, (bound by Speer Library, Princeton), p. 19

1852 " The undertaking to convert the world to Christ is a work of faith, inasmuch as it rests on the basis of Christ's commission and promises to his disciples." [Quoted in Ibid.] Leonard Bacon, A Sermon... p. 13 J.N. Harris, et.

" a renewed and explicit commission... " - p. 17
"... Faith realizes that the work is Christ's, that his commission is its warrant; and that his presence in it is the assurance of its ultimate success." - p. 14.

Yale " The germ, as it were, the promise, the possibility of all modern missionary enterprises, was in the evangelism of Edwards and Bellamy; in the praying and groaning, yet exulting self-sacrifice of Brainerd; in the tongue of cloven fire that set on Whitefield; in the apocalyptic fervor and daring of the Wesleys" - p. 26.

1850 - Richard S. Stone (Brantree Mass.) A Sermon... (Ibid #15)
" When the spirit that prompted the white body of Marianang brethren to resolve... to fulfill the Savior's commission... and impelled 46 of their number within 30 years to lay down their lives for the spiritual redemption of slaves... " - p. 31.

Elements of success: love of God, joy in the great salvation, due estimate of the soul's value, endurance, health, wisdom, compassion. - p. 37

1847 - Rev. David Meigs, Elizabethtown N.Y. A Sermon (Ibid # 14, p. 5)
" The commission under which we act runs thus - to turn men from darkness to light - from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified."

(on 26th anniv. of founding of ABCFM)

1835 Samuel Miller, pres. the Pr. Sem. Princeton A Sermon (Ibid #10) Boston: Crocker, Brewster, 1835
" All the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." ① It is God's promise ② It is reasonable, for they "is, in its nature adopted above all others to be a universal religion" (p. 12) ③ There is much reason to hope that the accomplishment of this promise is drawing nigh" - though "seven parts out of eight of the whole population of our globe are still sunk in deplorable darkness + corruption - of 800 m, ~~only~~ only 60m "are nominally Prot." and only 1/3 of them "have the real gospel of X't in anything like its purity preached to them; only 12m. are even professors of religion in evangelical congregations - i.e. - of 800 m of ~~the~~ ~~world~~ only 1/80 are evangelicals. (p. 15) But great signs of hope - stirring a zeal for mission (pp. 18 ff.

The Great Commission [Sermons and Addresses, vol. 1, PIS Spec Libr.]

1813. Timothy Dwight. pres. of Yale Coll. "A Sermon .. before the Am. Bd. Comm. for Am. 4th Annual Meeting" (Ibid #4)
(Boston, Samuel T. Armstrong, 1813)

"Almost all judicious commentators have agreed that the Millennium, in the full & perfect sense, will begin at a period not far from the year 2000... earlier than mankind have been accustomed to believe. But, should we fasten upon the year 2000 as the period in which there shall be a complete accomplishment of the predictions concerning this wonderful event, how evidently it is necessary, that all the measures by which it is to be accomplished, should now be formed, and immediately begin to operate. Should we, should all Protestant nations, awake out of our long sleep; and shake ourselves as mighty men; should we bring every heart, and hand, to this vast work; should we pursue it with a firmness which nothing can daunt, and an ardour which nothing can extinguish; how uninterrupted, how rapid, how successful must be our progress, in order to find its consummation at the date assigned?" pp. 25-26.

"In such an enterprise all, who engage in it, must be united.. If you do not unite their hearts, and their hands, they will effectuate nothing. Solitary efforts, here, will be fruitless. Divided efforts will be equally fruitless. Clashing efforts will destroy each other.

It is a shame for those, who wear the name of Christians, not to unite with other Christians in such a purpose as this. It is not the purpose of a sect, a party, or a name... It is a purpose of God... The work to which you are summoned is the Work of God."

1822

Samuel Miller

In order to better understand both Matthew 28:16-20 and Karl Barth's exegesis of it, I present the following literal translation in a schematic form to highlight the verbs that are used.¹

16. And the eleven disciples went to Galilee
(to the mount where Jesus appointed them.)
17. (And seeing him,)
they worshipped him,
but they doubted.
18. (And coming up)
Jesus talked with them,
(saying,)
All authority was given to me
(in heaven and upon earth.)
19. (Having gone, then,)
disciple all nations,
(baptizing them into the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,)
20. (teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you,)
and, behold, I am with you
(all the days until the completion of the age.) Amen.

The structure of verses 18b-20a (the heart of the passage) seems to be that one central imperative ("disciple") is guided by two participles ("baptizing" and "teaching") in light of two important indicatives ("all authority has been given to me" and "I am with you"). Barth develops his exegesis largely in terms of this structure and expands it in light of many other Scriptures.

He comments on "Go therefore and make disciples..." (44-45) in terms of his understanding of the apostolic church. For him in the Great Commission the founding of the apostolic church is envisaged. It is the church which receives the apostolic word and actively transmits it. Making disciples is at the heart of

of the church and its continued existence -- the process by which it becomes and continues to be apostolic. "It is constantly renewed as the listeners themselves become 'apostolic' and, as new disciples, begin to proclaim the good news."

While treating "...all nations..." (45-48) Barth considers the great problem of the text and presents the church as the eschatological Israel.

The problem regards the meaning of "all nations." For him it means "people from among all the nations who are received into discipleship" (45). "Them" which occurs twice in verses 19 and 20 cannot refer to the nations. "Not the nations as such are made disciples. This interpretation once infested missionary thinking and was connected with the painful fantasies of the German Christians. It is worthless" (46).

"All nations" not only does not exclude Israel from the church, but it also reflects the fact, as Barth sees it, that the apostolic church is also the eschatological Israel. It is "the Israel which receives into its life and history the chosen ones from among the Gentiles." It is not simply a special community within Israel nor a new form of the previous Israel. Rather it is "the Israel of the end time, fulfilling the destiny of the historical Israel, as 'a covenant to the people, a light to the nations' (Is. 42:6, 49:8)" (46).

He convincingly demonstrates that the church has never been anything else than the eschatological Israel by showing

that it was described that way consistently in the promises of the Old Testament and in the words of Jesus before its founding (46). In light of this consistent picture he also concludes that "the great Commission is truly the most genuine utterance of the risen Lord" (48). He apparently means that this form of the commandment is more genuinely the words of Jesus than are the ^{similar} words to be found in other parts of the Gospels.

He recognizes that the nature of the church in the teachings of Jesus was "at first relatively hidden" (47). He deals with this as the "not yet" -- it was not yet time and many things were not yet accomplished until the rejection and death of the Messiah (47-48).

"...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The making of disciples is achieved by baptism and teaching" (48).

For Barth baptism "constitutes the existence and the nature of discipleship" (50). Baptism is "the priestly function of objectively introducing others into the realm of God's reign." It is a function of Jesus which he transmits to his disciples (48-49). Baptism "in the name of" means "to give to someone the cleansing bath which certifies to him and to others that he belongs to this God" -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One becomes a disciple when one is assured that he or she belongs to the Triune God (49).

"teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."
...teaching constitutes the ways and works of the disciples" (50).

This understanding of time is the one in light of which Barth wrote the whole article.

I am impressed with the value and depth of Barth's contribution to our understanding of the Great Commission. He puts together Scriptures that are often left hanging separately, especially regarding time. He challenges me to think of the church more in terms of its apostolic nature -- that Christ did transmit certain powers and duties to the apostles and through them to the church which the church exercises by means of his presence in the church. I am fascinated with the concept of the eschatological Israel, apparently meaning that the church is a continuation of Israel to which early Jewish believers added Gentile believers rather than a Gentile replacement of Israel.

With regard to mission I am impressed with Barth's emphasis on making disciples within the fellowship of the church for service.

The one point at which he disappoints me in the article is that at which he chooses between forms of the Great Commission. I would prefer to see him try to reconcile the various forms and consider in more detail the contribution of each of them. His approach to those forms might be the necessary approach, but I am not yet convinced that it is.